



Metro, Newton airports following FAA funding legislation

Cycle set to move forward by March 2016

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As the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act moves through Congress in the months ahead, airports of all sizes will be following the process to see how they'll be affected by the end decisions.

Those airports not only include the expanses of runways and terminals at O'Hare, JFK and LAX, but also at smaller facilities such as Des Moines International or even Newton Municipal Airport.

"We're always monitoring that sort of thing," said Ethan Nasalroad, president of Johnson Aviation, which runs the Newton airport. "We do our best to make sure the voice of small airports, and airports in general, is heard."

The bill, which is supposed to be completed by the time an extension runs out in March 2016, will include complex funding for major commercial airports, but will also be counted upon for funding for competitive grants for smaller airports as well.

The Newton Municipal Airport received a grant for snow removal equipment in April 2015.

The Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Bill that was enacted in February 2012 authorized appropriations to the FAA from Fiscal Year 2012 through Fiscal Year 2015.

Kevin Foley, the executive director and general manager of Des Moines Airport, said the battlegrounds for airport funding are not typically state-capitol buildings or city council chambers, or even voting booths; it's in Congress.

"We think we have the entire Iowa (Congressional) delegation on board with what we're trying to accomplish," Foley said. "But, right now, there is a lot on Congress's plate, and even the Highway Transportation Bill is taking precedence over aviation."

Foley is also the vice president of the Iowa Public Airports Association, and Nasalroad is the secretary. The IPAA has four published priorities for the 2015 Reauthorization bill:

- Reinstating the local match levels in past legislation of 5 percent (Vision 100) for all airports.
- Fund the AIP program to provide \$3.6 billion in 2016 with \$100 million in increases every year throughout the reauthorization period. The funding, according to IPAA, has been static for 10

years.

- Because these are monies already collected and deposited in the Airport and Airway Trust Fund, we must protect these funds and budget from Sequestration or FAA Operating uses.
- Continue to fully fund the Non-Primary Entitlement for general-aviation airports.

Foley is also battling for funding to replace Des Moines' outdated terminal. It will take an estimated \$400 million, and one proposal is to raise the airport's Passenger Facility Charge from \$4.50 per airline passenger to \$8.50.

"The push-back on this is not from passengers," Foley said. "I haven't talked to anyone who wouldn't chip in an extra \$4 to have a modern airport here. The push-back is from the airlines, who fight to have added costs built into each ticket."

Nasalroad said aviation is unique in that many fees and surcharges collected stay in the industry, rather than go into a general government tax-money pool for use on everything from the bureau-chief salaries to road repair. He also said the amount of different systems Foley's Des Moines airport management must focus on is much different from Newton's focus, and it's easy to see why the funding streams are understandably different as well.

"It's really apples and oranges," Nasalroad said. "The state helps us with things like painting runways and forecasting and monitoring the weather, but a big airport like Des Moines, with all those commercial flights, they're spinning a lot more plates."

Foley said it's tough to gauge how the Reauthorization Bill will go in terms of dollars distributed, and how fast major facts will emerge.

"It's Congress, and you know how fast it moves," Foley said.

The Des Moines director encourages the public to do something he himself has done: write to members of Congress and make known their thoughts about airport funding. Foley has composed letters and has made his case whenever possible; he made a pitch for the new Des Moines terminal at an April round-table meeting with U.S. Sen. Joni Ernst.

"If you don't want to support big airports in larger cities, know that a strong Reauthorization Bill will help Des Moines, too," Foley said. "And it will also help support the smaller airports, too."

Contact Jason W. Brooks at 641-792-3121 ext. 6532 or jbrooks@newtondailynews.com

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